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## Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

### Report of the Secretary-General

**Addendum**

**Human resource development in small island developing States***

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## Introduction

1. Despite variations in per capita income, small island developing States share important characteristics, one of which is small population size. With small populations, they experience great difficulties in developing the human resources required for sustainable development. With support from the international community, small island developing States have undertaken extensive activities during the past five years at the national, regional and international levels aimed at developing human resources. The present report highlights some of these activities and identifies priorities and measures for future action.

## I. Progress made in human resource development

### A. At the national level

2. The status of human resource development in small island developing States varies considerably. A number of small island developing States have high scores on the human development index; while others lag behind.[1] However, the available trend data suggest that in recent years all but one of the small island developing States have made progress in developing their human resources at the basic level that is necessary for building specialized technical skills for environmental management. In the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States,[2] national actions have by and large focused on institution-building for environmental education, community participation and, to some extent, promotion of traditional knowledge. For example, in Cuba in 1995, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment was created, within which the Environmental Agency and its Centre for Information, Education and Public Environmental Awareness were set up.[3] In Barbados, close working ties have been forged among the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs, the National Council for Science and Technology and the National Commission on Sustainable Development.[4] In Mauritius, the Government provides an environmental education programme to raise awareness of pollution problems.[5] In the Bahamas, school curricula at the primary and secondary levels have been revised to address environmental and development concerns. Environmental health, sanitation, ecosystems, recycling, energy saving, and safe drinking water are now fully covered in the curricula.[6] In the Pacific region, the University of the South Pacific now offers an interdisciplinary programme for an undergraduate Bachelor of Science degree in environmental studies. Student enrolment has increased substantially in the last few years. The demand has spawned other environmental study programmes, both degree and non-degree, as well as postgraduate.[7]

3. In a number of small island developing States, efforts have been made to promote research and development in conjunction with the harnessing of the potentials of endogenous technologies and traditional practices, particularly in areas such as agriculture, waste recycling, biotechnology and construction where traditional knowledge is of great relevance. Similar efforts have been made to encourage the dissemination of traditional knowledge and skills.

4. In countries like Barbados, the Bahamas, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles and many others, community participation has played an increasingly important role in alleviating poverty, promoting environmental awareness and achieving sustainable livelihoods. Women are being encouraged to take non-traditional jobs and to prepare for them through available education and training facilities. More than ever, women are being brought into the decision-making process, and appointed to key ministerial positions.

### B. At the regional level

5. To overcome the constraints of inadequate capacity, small island developing States are making efforts to pool resources through regional cooperative arrangements so as to attain sustainable development objectives. The following are a few examples:

(a) A Caribbean project for adaptation to global climate change is under way, assisting 11 countries in strengthening regional capacity to monitor and analyse sea-level dynamics and trends. The project focuses on building the capacity of national and regional institutions to implement specific measures, administer information systems, research and monitor selected parameters, analyse data and manage the process of preparation for adaptation;[8]

(b) A Pacific Island Climate Change Assistance Project is being implemented through the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP), the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), the University of the South Pacific and other institutions. SPREP has carried out studies on assessment of climate change impacts in 12 Pacific small island developing States; SOPAC

has assisted Fiji and Kiribati in carrying out studies of vulnerability to erosion and has run seminars on coastal monitoring in Tuvalu, Kiribati and Western Samoa;[9]

(c) In the Caribbean, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States is providing various kinds of support to member States to alleviate the constraints of inadequate human resource capacity, including in technical assistance in environmental management, financial resources for training, technical information on natural resource management and the preparation of policy briefs;

(d) Regional cooperation in waste management, and in coastal and marine resources as well as in tourism has also been initiated. In the areas of hazardous and ship-generated wastes, training workshops have been organized in the South Pacific and Caribbean regions to enhance awareness and strengthen national capacities.

(e) In the Pacific, SPREP, in addition to its various technical assistance to Pacific small island developing States, is undertaking environmental law training activities in the framework of Capacity 21 programmes in selected islands, and has planned a workshop on environmental treaties and conventions involving all Pacific island countries.

## C. Support at the international level

6. The international community has provided support through project funding or technical assistance. The projects cover a broad range of areas, including health care, education, and training in expertise in specific fields such as trade, coastal area management and maritime transport. A brief account of some of these activities is provided below.

### 1. Bilateral contributions

7. Information obtained from bilateral donors shows that they consider human resource development a key area for external support. Education and health-care projects have attracted substantial resources, with many projects devoted to teacher training, upgrading of educational facilities, including distance learning, and support to public health. For instance, during the period 1994–1998, Japan allocated US$ 57.8 million to several projects in Pacific small island developing States aimed at upgrading and expanding education facilities. Luxembourg, among others, provided funds for projects to strengthen the public-health service and promote primary health care.

8. Some bilateral donors have also emphasized the strengthening of major groups, especially women and trade unions. During the period 1994–1998, New Zealand, for instance, allocated US$ 23.6 million to various projects in South Pacific small island developing States to assist in community training and employment, strengthening women's non-governmental organizations, and promoting private sector development. Austria, Finland and Norway, among others, provided funds to various small island developing States to promote literacy of ethnic groups, support women's participation and strengthen trade union activities.

### 2. Multilateral contributions

9. Organizations within the United Nations system provide funding support and technical assistance to small island developing States in various areas of human resource development. For example, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Bank have funded projects in small island developing States for maternal and child health care. The World Health Organization (WHO) has organized meetings and workshops in the Caribbean and Pacific regions to address issues related to health and environment. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have provided training to participants from small island developing States in coastal, freshwater and marine resources management. Other United Nations bodies, such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) have provided specialist training to technical personnel from small island developing States in their areas of competence.

10. UNDP through its Capacity 21 fund has provided support to Pacific and Caribbean small island developing States in strengthening their capacity for achieving sustainable development objectives. In the Pacific small island developing States, Capacity 21 projects have had a small but significant impact in raising awareness and in strengthening institutional capacity in a number of countries. In the Caribbean region, Capacity 21 projects have spawned several initiatives in participating countries, including the establishment of sustainable development councils and the launching of broad-based participatory processes in the formulation and implementation of sustainable development strategy.

11. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Economic Commission for

Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) have developed significant programmes focusing on the small island developing States in their respective regions. They have run training courses for participants from small island developing States in various technical fields, as well as in areas directly related to human resource development such as environmental education, population and development, and women in development.

12. The Commonwealth Secretariat has been providing training opportunities to Caribbean, Pacific and other island countries on women and natural resource management; entrepreneurship development of women; primary health care and immunization; and transfer of environmentally sound technology and information technology.

## II. Constraints and problems in human resource development

13. Despite national actions and international support, progress in human resource development has been inhibited by the inadequacy of financial resources and inadequate training facilities at the national level. Furthermore, support by international organizations is sometimes hampered by shortage of funds.

14. Inadequacy of financial resources is the most important obstacle. In addition to their general educational and health-care needs, small island developing States experience the need for specialized expertise in environmental management in a number of areas. While there is a consensus on the importance of human resource development, with funds having been channelled to this area, the resources made available are simply not sufficient to meet the immediate needs.

15. The inadequacy of human resource capacity, among other things, continues to impede progress in sustainable development. For example, the Government of Barbados has pointed out that strains on national human and institutional resources have hampered the efforts of Barbados to implement policies and programmes to address the issues of trade and environment.[4] The Government of the Bahamas has indicated that the country does not possess the human and financial resources to expand and further develop the sustainable use of its natural resources.[6] In Seychelles, lack of well-trained personnel has been identified as a key factor constraining the effective management of national parks.[10] In Haiti, no research scientists or engineers work full time in the field of environment and development.[11]

16. In several small island developing States, lack of resources has resulted in the curtailment of training opportunities. At a time when small island developing States are struggling to keep abreast of globalization which is making fresh demands on human resources, lack of training opportunities hampers the supply of new skills and places the existing capacity, already limited, under greater strain. A number of small island developing States have identified lack of training opportunities as a key bottleneck in respect of building up and maintaining local capacity. The implications of shortage of funds are no less serious for regional projects. Regional organizations often cannot make commitments to providing much-needed training to member countries. The demands are too many; the resources at their disposal too few. Several regional organizations need to strengthen their own human resources before they can contribute effectively to the development of the human resources of member States.

17. Within small island developing States, Governments have increasingly realized that they need to establish effective coordination mechanisms. Often several ministries are involved in capacity-building with inevitable duplication of efforts. Some have acknowledged that there are too many agencies dealing with sustainable development, and there is an urgent need for enhancing coordination both at policy and at operational levels.

18. Furthermore, Governments need to deal with the issue of the retention of trained manpower. National reports indicate that trained manpower often emigrates, thus giving rise to new needs for training. While no systematic data exist on the turnovers of trained manpower, thereby making it difficult to gauge their magnitude, the problem is considered serious in some sectors like information technology. There is evidently a need for Governments to devise incentives to retain trained manpower and to attract nationals with specialized skills who are working abroad.

## III. Priorities for action

19. Given their demographic constraints, small island developing States need to build a well-educated, highly adaptable and environmentally knowledgeable workforce as the mainstay of national sustainable development. Governments should continue to accord priority to human resource development in all its dimensions — health care, basic education, environmental education, technical training and resource management in specific fields. For those small island developing States that have achieved high enrolment ratios at the primary and secondary levels, efforts should be

made to strengthen higher education, including in the specialized fields of natural and environmental resource management. Equally important, Governments should create conditions, including through regional mechanisms, to retain technically skilled manpower and to attract expertise from overseas.

20. Resource mobilization for human resource development should continue to be a top priority. Governments should look into domestic funding sources through the use of economic instruments such as appropriate environmental taxation and should allocate sufficient funds for education and training. Likewise, the international community should maintain the priority it has accorded to human resource development in small island developing States by channelling increased resources to poverty alleviation, health care, education, community participation and training.

21. The need for coordination in human resource development should be addressed at the highest political level. There should be mechanisms facilitating information exchanges so that all stakeholders are aware of the current levels of, and future needs for, specific skills and opportunities. Renewed efforts should be made to ensure cooperation and coordination among ministries, local and national authorities and donors. Every effort should be made to identify opportunities for synergy and for cost-saving. Distance education and use of the Internet should be supported and expanded. Cost-effective mechanisms for exchanging information and experiences within and between countries should be set up or strengthened so as to fully tap the lessons learned from past experiences.

22. Small island developing States should further strengthen regional cooperation for human resource development, increase the effectiveness of such cooperation through systematic identification of needs for specific skills, and increase the efficiency of regional resource use through better coordination.

23. Entities of the United Nations system should strengthen their support by increasing their operational activities in technical training. Areas where local capacity is relatively small should be accorded priority in funding and provision of technical assistance.

## IV. Recommendations for the future programme of work

**24. The Commission may wish to invite Governments of small island developing States to include in their national reports to the Commission a section on the status of the human resource needs of small island developing States with reference to specific sectors so as to facilitate the Commission's consideration of the relevant issues.**

**25. The Commission may invite bilateral donors to update annually information on financial resources allocated to human resource development in specific areas so as to assist the Commission in monitoring the appropriateness and levels of resource flows into this important area.**

*Notes*

[1] See United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report, 1998* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1998), Human development indicators, table 5.

[2] *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April–6 May 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.I.18 and corrigenda), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[3] See Cuba: country profile (E/CN.17/1997/Misc.67).

[4] See Barbados: country profile (E/CN.17/1997/Misc.57).

[5] See Mauritius: country profile (E/CN.17/1997/Misc.4).

[6] See Bahamas: country profile (E/CN.17/1997/Misc.66).

[7] See report of the Commission on Sustainable Development on activities to implement the Barbados Programme of Action in the Pacific region, prepared by the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) jointly with the ESCAP Pacific Operations Centre and with the financial assistance of the Governments of Australia and New Zealand.

[8] Global Environment Facility, *Quarterly Operational Report*, November 1996.

[9] Global Environment Facility, *Quarterly Operational Report*, November 1996, and report of the Commission on Sustainable Development on activities to implement the Barbados Programme of Action in the Pacific region, prepared by SPREP jointly with the ESCAP Pacific Operations Centre.

[10] See report entitled "Achieving sustainable development: environmental management plan of the Seychelles, 1990–2000", prepared by the Government of Seychelles with the advice and assistance of the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank.

[11] Haiti: country profile (E/CN.17/Misc.36).